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NINTH PLENUM SPEECH OF STEFAN MATUSZEWSKI  
ON TASKS OF PEOPLE'S COUNCILS AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN POLAND

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[The following report of Stefan Matuszewski was given at the Ninth Plenum of the KC PZPR (Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party), held in Warsaw on 29-30 October 1953.]

The report was given at the plenum as an amplification of the featured report of Premier Boleslaw Bierut, "Task of the Party in Struggle to Raise Standard of Living of Workers in Current Phase of Building Socialism." An English-language translation of Bierut's report is available in the PAP (Polish Press Agency) release of 6 November 1953, pages 1-44.]

One of the main problems of the present period in the building of socialism is to raise the standard of living of the working masses. In his speech Comrade Bierut told the party, the state apparatus, the trade unions, and the people's councils what should be done to assure a more rapid improvement in the welfare and culture of the people.

I would like to emphasize that the people's councils must increase their interest in whatever directly affects the workers in the city and in the village.

The councils have done some work in this direction. They have improved their style of work, they have come closer to the people, and they have mobilized them to participate in governing the state. However, there are still many shortcomings, much negligence, indifference, and incompetence.

To improve the welfare of the working masses, these shortcomings must be regarded seriously; they must be eliminated.

Many other elements besides wages make up the standard of living, the most important of which may be: an efficient communal economy or administration, and a well organized health service and welfare program.

Good housing, proper maintenance of roads and streets, development of urban transportation, public bath facilities, adequate source of electricity, adequate water supply, adequate gas supply, a well organized medical service, care of the sick, care of the aged, and care of the disabled -- all these are the tasks which the people's authority must contemplate in order to raise the standard of living of the working masses. These tasks must be studied more carefully by the party organizations at all levels and by the regional governing bodies.

Let us look at the work of the people's councils in housing. We have been expanding housing construction on an unheard-of scale. We have been expending large sums on communal maintenance, repairs, and installations. However, we have not followed through to see that the work was carried out. We have been lax in dispensing the allotted sums properly, and in eliminating willfulness, waste, poor quality, and defects. For instance, in 1953 major repairs to housing facilities are to cover 513,400 rooms. This over-all plan has generally been fulfilled, but certain wojewodztwos, especially Olsztyn and Lublin, have been very lax in carrying out their plans. The administration of regional housing offices is very inefficient.

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In the first quarter of 1953, the people's councils of Stalinogrod Wojewodztwo passed resolutions to reduce allotments of housing space for private tenants and office use, and to increase housing space allotments of the working class. However, the action stopped with the resolution. The presidium of the municipal people's council allocated only two rooms to miners in the first quarter. The situation was improved in the second and third quarters at the intervention of the central authorities. The miners were allotted 143 housing units, a total of 236 rooms.

The housing administration in Koszalin is also very inefficient. Many workers must commute daily from outlying powiats, live with their families in tourist rooms, or sleep in their offices. Meanwhile, the housing space is not being properly utilized. At a session in 1953, council member Wojcik stated that some persons were subleasing buildings and converting them into rooming houses. The presidium of the Municipal People's Council passed a resolution in the matter, but so far there has been no interest in implementing it.

It is apparent from the Koszalin example that certain people's councils have not properly utilized their capabilities, and that valuable public property has been badly mismanaged. The block committees could be very helpful by persuading tenants to make small repairs, clean up the grounds, and take good care of the property. Unfortunately, many block committees have not had proper support from the presidium of the councils. In many instances, they have treated the block committees merely as their lower administrative cells.

Next in line is water, gas, and light supply. Technical equipment must be improved, losses throughout the system reduced, and waste of water and gas eliminated. The demands for service could thus be covered without additional investment outlays. In the cities of Olsztyn Wojewodztwo, especially Szczytno, about 50 percent of the water is lost along the water systems while only 22 percent of the credits allotted for repairs to water systems were utilized in the first half of 1953.

Attention is called to the fact that 8 percent of the water in the public water system is impure. The problem of water pollution is closely connected with the problem of public wells, which are not always properly maintained.

The plans for gas supply to the network and to the consumer have not been properly fulfilled. One reason is the laxity in repairing gas stoves, and another is waste and increased losses of gas throughout the network.

The people's councils and party organizations must show more interest in the adequate supply of electric light. Cutting off electric power is often looked upon as something for which there is no remedy.

There is much work to be done in the improvement of health services. The Ministry of Health has been combating bureaucracy, helping the field office in improving medical care, organizing clinics, and training health service personnel. However, the quality of work is hampered in many ways. The ministry has employed many office workers but has not adequately increased the professional personnel.

Although we have 2.5 times as many doctors and 6 times as many nurses as we had in 1945, there are still not enough for the needs of our people. Medical and nursing personnel are not properly distributed, nor are they used to the best advantage. In certain parts of the country the shortage of doctors and trained nurses is very acute.

We must take steps to increase the number of hospital beds, especially in sanatoriums, hospitals for infectious diseases, and maternity hospitals.

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The health service and the people's councils must increase their efforts to provide regular living quarters for health-service personnel now occupying hospital space and to make room for more hospital beds. We must also provide better quarters and equipment for out-patient clinics.

Up to now, the Ministry of Health has not exercised systematic supervision over the construction of health-service facilities.

Although, in general, our health service personnel is very devoted, there have been many complaints of the heartless attitude of some members. There is the case of Doctor Srebrny of Zielona Gora. He made a wrong diagnosis and to avoid having to admit his error refused to admit a child to the hospital. The child died from the lack of proper medical care. Several other complaints had been made against Doctor Srebrny. He was tried, found guilty, and sentenced to prison. There are more examples like this. The lenient attitude of the Ministry of Health and the people's councils in these matters is demoralizing to a certain degree to the health service.

The Trade Union of Health-Service Workers and the Polish Red Cross ought to instill a feeling of great responsibility in workers and a desire to give the best possible service.

The regional authorities show little understanding of the problem of raising the level of public health and hygiene. Disinfection measures, swimming pools, and public bath facilities have not been properly utilized. The equipment and sanitation of many public baths is most unsatisfactory. The bath enterprises are out to make a profit and are not concerned with proper equipment. Instead of reducing prices, they have kept them rather high.

In employment and social welfare, the problem of the working mother should receive more attention. We must study the problem of employment for women in small towns containing no large industrial enterprises.

The development of industrial centers and work cooperatives in these towns and settlements will not only increase the volume of basic commodity production, but will provide employment for persons who, up to now, have not participated in the building of socialism.

In his speech of 21 July to the People's Council of Warsaw, Comrade Bierut pointed out, among other things, that the people's councils must fight bureaucratic warping of the party line more vigorously by giving immediate attention to the complaints of peasants. We must combat favoritism and protect the working peasants from kulak speculators and unscrupulous officials under their influence. The present method of the people's councils in examining grievances and complaints must be improved.

The many complaints of bureaucratic attitudes of certain presidiums of people's councils which come into the central office of the party and the government daily indicate that certain workers are very arrogant in handling the complaints of the peasants and make no effort to understand their problems.

This, of course, affects the attitude of the peasants toward the people's councils, affects the course of grain deliveries, and also the peasants' feeling of responsibility toward the government. Where the people's councils have treated the peasants as allies and with understanding and sympathy in the class struggle against the kulak speculators, the peasants' reaction has been more favorable.

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Comrade Bierut's speech and the theses indicate that there are available reserves for improving the conditions of the working masses, materially and culturally. Today's plenum of the Central Committee should increase our interest in the welfare problems of the workers and the peasants, in the development of the worker-peasant alliance, and in a full exploitation of all possible reserves to assure an improvement in the standard of living for the workers in the cities and in the villages.

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